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UAW head: Delphi Chap. 11 unneeded: He says talks with the auto supplier are progressing
Justin Hyde
Detroit Free Press

Feb. 6--UAW President Ron Gettelfinger said Sunday that while talks over the future of Delphi Corp. were progressing, he still did not see a reason for the parts supplier to file for bankruptcy.

"At least we're talking," Gettelfinger said after giving an opening speech to 1,600 delegates at the UAW's annual political conference in Washington, calling the talks "preliminary."

"This is a mechanical bankruptcy," he added. "I firmly do not believe Delphi needs to be in bankruptcy."

The bankruptcy of Delphi and several other auto parts companies, as well as plans by GM and Ford to cut 60,000 workers, suffused much of the talk during the opening session of the UAW's National Community Action Program Conference. The CAP is the union's political arm, charged with lobbying for the interests of the UAW's 1.2 million active and retired workers.

Delphi filed for bankruptcy Oct. 8 after efforts to win labor concessions from its unions and ballout money from GM failed. The supplier expects to emerge from bankruptcy in summer 2007.

Last month, Delphi withdrew contract proposals it made in November that included cuts in wages of more than 63% and plans to eliminate 24,000, or 60%, of the jobs with its labor unions. Delphi Chief Executive Steve Miller, who drew the ire of UAW leaders for calling autoworkers' pay and benefits too high, has not disclosed Delphi's current proposals.

Gettelfinger declined to specify any new proposals from Delphi, which has said it could ask the bankruptcy court to throw out its union contracts.

"I can't speak for them, but I simply say it would be a mistake to void those contracts," Gettelfinger said. "We're keeping all of our options open."

GM said last month that its liabilities for UAW workers at Delphi could range between \$3.5 billion and \$12 billion. It stepped in to avert a labor strike at its largest supplier, which could quickly cripple GM's North American factories.

In his speech to delegates, Gettelfinger hailed two political victories for the UAW last year: its role in halting President George W. Bush's efforts to revamp Social Security and its work on pension reform bills. But he told the conference that the stakes for the union's members were rising.

The UAW's legislative goals for this year include a so-called Marshall Plan for automakers

and auto parts companies to revamp plants, a reform in bankruptcy laws, the final passage of pension reform rules and blocking any free-trade agreement with Thailand that could lower U.S. tariffs on imported pickup trucks.

"The challenges we face are great, and the struggles in front of us are many," he said.
"We have no choice but to dig in for the fight."

---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

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